

## A Comparative Study of Male vs. Female Iranian EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate and their International Posture

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) in a foreign or second language (L2) has been widely used after the rising popularity of communicative language teaching (CLT) movement. Recent research has concentrated on various factors that may influence L2 learners' WTC. International posture (IP) is another related concept that refers to L2 learners' attitudes towards the people and the community whose language they are trying to learn. The current research attempted to compare the amount of WTC and IP across Iranian male and female EFL learners and also to investigate the relationship between the two variables in two genders.

**Methodology:** The study was conducted with a group of 112 (49 male and 63 female) participants selected from an initial group of 171 EFL learners who studied English language teaching and translation in four universities in East Azarbaijan Province, Iran. The data were collected by the administration of a questionnaire known as 'WTC Scale' published by McCroskey (1992) and the IP questionnaire made by Yashima (2002). Between-group comparison was made to compare the male and female groups.

**Results:** The results of the analyses showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of both WTC and IP. The Pearson Correlation analysis on the questionnaire data also showed that there was almost high positive correlation between WTC and IP in both male and female groups.

**Conclusion:** The findings of the study could offer pedagogical implications for EFL teachers, learners and material designers as well as suggestions for further research.

**Keywords:** Iranian EFL Learners' Gender, International Posture, Willingness to Communicate.

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## Introduction

Fluent communication in English as a Foreign or Second Language (L2) has always been the interest and goal of L2 teaching. Researchers in the area of L2 teaching research (e.g., Dornyei, 2003; Seliger, 1977; Swain, 1998) have attempted to shed light on the processes and routes that may lead L2 learners to achieve this goal. This interest in research has been particularly fueled by the turn of attention from teaching and teaching-centered to learner and learner-centered L2 pedagogy since 1960s. As a result of this attention change, L2 learners' personal factors and individual variables have come to be under notice and consideration as key elements of success and achievement in L2 learning. As Widdowson (1990) has rightly pointed out the L2 'use' in social situations rather than mastery of 'usage' and grammatical system of L2 has come to be the aim of L2 teaching and learning. In fact, communication in L2 is now the main purpose of L2 learners and the use of L2 is an indicator of successful L2 learning. As Dornyei (2003) states, linguistic competence in L2 is not sufficient by itself, learners should be both able and willing to communicate in real communication situations. Some researchers (e.g., Donato, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Swain, 2000) have suggested that L2 learners acquire language when they collaborate and interact with other speakers through comprehensible communication. Swain (2000) pointed out that "language use and language learning can co-occur" and "it is language use that mediates language learning" (p. 97). Along with such personality factors as motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-confidence, the learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) has come to be considered as a significant affective and psycho-social factor which may account for learners' success in L2 learning (see Dornyei, 2003). The concept of WTC was put forward and defined by McCroskey and Richmond (1987) as a person's general tendency to take part in communicative interactions. Many factors may influence a person's desire to talk with other people. A person's feeling and mood on a certain time, his or her past experience of conversation with a certain person, his or her familiarity with the topic of conversation are among factors that may affect their desire to enter communication in a certain situation. Thus, WTC can be viewed as context sensitive. McCroskey (1997) defines the concept as "an individual's predisposition to initiate communication with others" (p. 77). MacIntyre (1994) suggested a model for WTC in L1 acquisition in which the learners' perceived communication ability and speaking anxiety have direct influence on their WTC. This model proposed that people who have higher language proficiency level and lower speaking stress show higher desire to speak with other people. Another influencing variable in his model was the personality trait known as introversion and also communication apprehension. Other researchers have suggested that a person's communicative ability and 'communication apprehension' can significantly predict his or her level of WTC (e.g., Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al. 2001). Some years later, MacIntyre and his colleagues (MacIntyre, et al., 1998) claimed that in L2 situation, the context is more complicated because L2 proficiency level is an additional variable. Therefore, they came to the conclusion that WTC in the L2 must be different from WTC in the L1. Thus, they defined the term as a person's readiness to enter into communication at a particular time with people by using the foreign language and they also offered a model in order to show the interrelation between L2 learners' attitude and WTC with the claim that "authentic communication in the L2 can be seen as the result of complex system of interrelated variables" (p. 547). They used this model to explain English language students' different levels of WTC that have significant correlation with various affective and cognitive factors. In the last two or three decades, WTC has attracted SLA researchers' attention and interest to identify the factors that may come to affect L2 WTC. Furthermore, under the influence of socio-cultural theory of language acquisition, it has been emphasized that language is learned through meaningful communication and interaction in social situations (Swain & Lapkin, 2002). Therefore, it seems important to explore the factors which either constrain or improve L2 learners' opportunities to enter meaningful communication.

Another recent concept that has been developed in the L2 learning and teaching literature is the concept of International Posture (IP) which has been used and defined by Yashima and her colleagues (2002, 2004, 2009) as a foreign language learner's tendency to relate himself or herself to the international community and the people who live in different places in the world. This concept is very similar to Gardner's (1985) concept of integrative motivation. However, the concept of integrative motivation was used by Gardner in Canadian situation where the learners were in contact with native speakers of L2, but the situation in Japan was different from Canada and Japanese EFL learners could not identify English with any specific L2 group (Yashima, 2009). In fact Japanese EFL learners do not have direct interaction with English native speakers. Thus, Gardner's integrative orientation to explain Japanese

EFL students' motivation to learn English was not appropriate. The IP construct was developed after Yashima's (2000) exploratory research with Japanese university students who were asked to identify the three main important reasons why they were studying English. The results of the research showed that the identification and interest with a specific native speaker group or community (British or American) was the least important motivational factor by the participants while the instrumental and international friendship orientation was perceived to be the most important and later labeled as "international posture" (IP) by Yashima (2002). It was defined as the learners' favorable attitudes towards English and their perceived tendency to be "connected to the international community, have concerns for international affairs" and have a "readiness to interact with people other than Japanese" (Yashima, 2009, p. 146). Yashima (2002) claimed that EFL learners' IP could be a strong predictor of their WTC inside and outside the classroom. This relationship has been further investigated in several research studies (Aliakbari, et al., 2016; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Matsuoka, 2005; Ulu, et al., 2015, as cited in Botes, et al., 2020) that have all found that the more positive attitude towards the international community and the higher the need to use English in intercultural communication, the higher the learners' willingness and tendency to communicate in English in different situations.

In a recent study, Mahmoodi, Ghafoori, and Beh-Afarin (2021) attempted to investigate the relationship between male Iranian EFL learners' international posture (IP) and willingness to communicate (WTC) across two proficiency levels. The study was carried out with 106 participants from selected universities in Tabriz and Sarab, Northwest Iran, who were divided into two groups of high and low proficiency based on a Preliminary English Test (PET). The analysis of the data collected by the administration of WTC Scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990) and IP questionnaire (Yashima, 2000) showed that there was positive correlation between WTC and IP in the high-proficiency group while the correlation in the low proficiency-group was not statistically significant. It was also found that high proficiency learners had higher levels of both IP and WTC compared to their lower level counterparts.

In another recent study in Thailand, Darasawang and Reinders (2021) attempted to investigate the relationship between students' proficiency level and their willingness to communicate. The researchers found the correlation between 1836 Thai university students' English Placement Test scores with their level of WTC as measured through a three-part survey instrument, with WTC operationalised as "self-perceived willingness to communicate", "communicative self-confidence", and "self-perceived L2 use" and found a weak to moderate correlation between WTC and language proficiency, with the construct of "self-confidence" being the most strongly correlated.

Among several variables related to WTC, L2 learners' gender has also been revealed as having substantial effect on learners' WTC level. MacIntyre, et al. (2002) found that female learners appeared to outperform their male peers in terms of WTC levels. However, the study conducted by Jamaledin (2015) challenged their findings and showed that male learners had much higher WTC in L2 compared to female learners. Sifting through the related literature shows that learners' gender may have significant impact on communication and influence learners' WTC as well as other variables. Gardner (1985) refers to some research studies that showed girls had more positive attitudes toward L2 learning than boys. Gholami (2015), in a research study in Iranian EFL context, investigated the potential correlation between L2 learners' emotional intelligence and their WTC considering their gender. The results of the correlational analysis showed a positive correlation between learner's WTC and their emotional intelligence level and it was also found that female learners had higher levels of emotional intelligence and WTC.

Regarding the issue of the L2 learners' gender and their WTC, previous research has reached different and sometimes contradictory results. An investigation was made by Maftoon and Najafi (2013) who used MacIntyre, et al.'s (2001) WTC questionnaire to examine the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' gender and their desire to enter communication and found that female participants had higher degree of WTC than male ones. Arshad, et al. (2015), in a study in Pakistan, with 353 undergraduate students from a public sector university found that there were no major differences among the students in the use of foreign language inside and outside classroom but there were slight differences between boys' and girls' WTC. Male students willingly participated in communication through English language, more specifically in speaking while female students more readily used English in reading and writing.

Some other studies have found that learners' gender did not result in any significant difference in their WTC. For example Valadi et al. (2015) carried out a study with 140 Iranian EFL learners and found that there was no significant difference between male and female participants' WTC. In another study

conducted by Afghari and Sadeghi (2012), with 55 university students from the English department in Iran, no significant difference was found between male and female participants in their WTC. Zakian (2019) conducted another study in Iran considering the EFL learners' level of intelligence and its probable relation to WTC across male and female learners. The study was carried out with 46 Iranian EFL learners divided into less and more intelligent groups, based on the results of an initial test of intelligence. Both groups were given the WTC questionnaire. The analysis of the questionnaire data revealed that there was a significant difference between the less and more intelligent groups' WTC levels but no difference between male and female participants in that regard. The researchers concluded that L2 learners' level of intelligence might be an important factor in their desire to take steps in communication activities. More intelligent participants showed higher WTC. In a research project in Turkey, Öksüz-Zerey and Cephe (2020) attempted to study Turkish elementary school students' perception of language classrooms and its relationship to their levels of WTC. The research also concentrated on the learners' gender differences to explore whether it had any effect on the learners' WTC and perceptions of the classroom environments. The researchers found that all the students, regardless of their gender, had positive perceptions towards the classroom environment and were also interested to communicate in English language. In another recent study in Turkish EFL context, Sinnett and Alishah (2021) attempted to examine Turkish university EFL learners' gender in relation to their 'self-perceived communicative competence' and 'communication apprehension' as two widely quoted variables underlying the notion of WTC. The study was conducted with a sample of 282 male and female ELT undergraduate students from four universities in Turkey. The researchers found that there was not statistically significant difference between male (n=119) and female (n=163) participants regarding the research variables. In a study conducted in China at the university level Ma (2014) investigated the university students' attitudes towards EFL and showed that girls held a more positive attitude to EFL than boys. In another study in China, Jiang (2013) conducted a longitudinal study with a mixed method design focusing on gender issues. Based on Dornyei's (2009, cited in Jiang, 2013) L2 Motivational Self System and Yashima's (2009) international posture system, the researcher found that over a 12-month period female learners had more significant and positive changes in both motivational and IP variables than male learners. This finding was discussed and justified by the researcher in relation to social and contextual value systems in Chinese EFL context where the study was conducted. Akdemir (2019) also found that learners' gender affected their attitude and motivation. Female EFL learners had more positive attitude and higher motivation to EFL learning.

As it can be found in the literature concerning gender differences and the learners' attitudes to English language learning as well as their WTC, the previous research has reached heterogeneous results and further research is required to reach more conclusive results. Accordingly, in the current research project, we tried to replicate the previous research to compare the amount of WTC and IP between male and female participants and to examine the type and degree of the relationship between WTC and IP in male and female groups. Five research questions were formulated in the present study as follows:

- 1) Is there any statistically significant difference between male and female EFL learners' WTC?
- 2) Is there any significant difference between male and female EFL learners' IP?
- 3) Is there any significant relationship between Iranian male EFL learners' WTC and IP?
- 4) Is there any significant relationship between Iranian female EFL learners' WTC and IP?
- 5) Is there any significant difference between correlation values observed in male and female groups?

This last question compares the correlation values observed in male and female groups and it is different from Q1. It is in fact related to Q3 and Q4 and compares the results of these two questions.

### **Methodology**

Purposeful and convenience sampling was used to select participants. In this type of sampling, the participants are selected based on their own willingness and being available (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The initial number of students who accepted to participate in the study was 180 who were first and second year university students studying English Language Teaching (TEFL) and English Translation in Islamic Azad University and Payameh-noor University, in Sarab and Tabriz, two cities in East Azerbaijan. From this initial group, nine students withdrew from the study and did not return the test and questionnaire papers. Thus, the study was carried out with 171 participants who were both male and female and at the age range of 18 to 29, all from East Azarbayjan. Three instruments were used for data collection in the study. The Preliminary English Test (PET) was used to examine the participants' level of English language proficiency and to select a homogeneous sample. The test had four parts corresponding to four language skills. However, for practicality considerations and some restrictions

the speaking part of the test was excluded and the other three parts including reading, writing, and listening parts were administered. The score range of the remaining parts of the test was 0 to 75. The instrument which was employed in the present study to collect the participants' WTC data was a 20-item scaled questionnaire published by McCroskey (1992). The participants were required to answer each items by selecting a number between 0 and 100 showing the percentage of their agreement with the situation in the item. The average of percentage scores for the items was calculated as each individual's score in the WTC Scale. Thus, the scores were in interval scale.

To measure the participants' IP, the researcher used a questionnaire designed by Yashima (2000) including 31 items and based on research with Japanese EFL learners. Each item had a 7-point scale that the participants selected with regard to their agreement or disagreement. The scale had subdivisions as follows. Items 1 to 4 (Intercultural Friendship Orientation) were related to intercultural friendship and asked the participants' reasons for taking English courses. Items 5 to 10 (Motivational Intensity) rated the learners' motivation to take communication risks. Items 11 to 16 asked the learners' desire to learn English. Items 17 to 23 asked the participants' desire to accept or reject foreign people in the local community. Items 24 to 29 examined the learners' interest in foreign events or news and their desire to live abroad. Items 30 and 31 asked the students' interest in international issues for example reading or watching news about events in foreign countries. Thus, the range of the scores in the interval scale was between 7 and 217.

The study took a quantitative and correlational design. The research variables were WTC, IP and the participants' gender. In addition to correlational design, the study also took Between-Group Comparison design to compare the participants' WTC and IP between male and female groups. The study began with the researcher's inviting the students who studied TEFL and English Translation in Tabriz and Sarab Islamic Azad and Payameh-noor Universities in East Azarbayjan Province, in Autumn 2020 when the classes were held nonvirtually (in person) virtually before the outbreak of Covid 19. From among the students who were informed and invited, 171 students (both male and female) finally accepted to participate in the study. The PET as an English proficiency test was given to the participants from whom 112 (49 male and 63 female) participants who got scores within one SD around the mean score of the test were selected as the homogeneous sample in terms of general English proficiency.

Before the administration of the questionnaires, their reliability and validity were checked. The reliability of the questionnaires was examined through their pilot administration to a group of 25 students from the same population. Cronbach  $\alpha$  as the indicator of internal consistency of the items was found to be .89 and .91 for the WTC and IP questionnaires, respectively. For validity considerations, expert opinion and back-translation techniques were conducted. The American Psychological Association (2002) defines back-translation as a method of translation in which "a text is translated into another language and then back into the first to ensure that it is equivalent enough that results can be compared." (p. 20). The original English versions were translated to Farsi and then back-translated into English. Two experienced EFL teachers were consulted for the final modified versions.

The participants were then given the questionnaires and guided and informed as to how to respond and fill out the answer sheets. They were also ensured that their names and identities would be kept confidential. In all data collection sessions, the researcher was present to explain the goal of the study and help the participants to fully understand the content of the items in the questionnaires. In some cases, the researcher had to translate some items into Farsi in order to ensure their comprehensibility. The answer sheets were then collected and scored by the researcher and the results were statistically analyzed to answer the research questions.

### **Results and Discussion**

Descriptive statistics were used found for the distribution of the scores extracted from the questionnaires. The normality of the distributions as a prerequisite assumption prior to employ parametric inferential statistics was tested through One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test. Since the data were in interval scale, the Independent Samples t-test was used to examine the significance of the differences between the mean scores of WTC and IP scores obtained from male and female groups. Pearson correlation statistics was also run in order to find the type and amount of relationship between WTC and IP as two research variables in male and female groups. Furthermore, Fisher z- formula was also used to examine the difference between the correlation coefficients observed in male and female groups. The significance level (Alpha Level) for checking the null hypotheses formulated in corresponding to the research questions was set to .05. The results of the analyses and the findings are

discussed in the next parts. The participants' general English proficiency was tested by the administration of the PET with the purpose of selecting a homogeneous sample by excluding the outliers who got scores beyond the range of one SD around the mean score. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the test results.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics for English Proficiency Test Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET	171	30	74	52.95	11.252
Valid N (listwise)	171				

As it is seen in Table 1, the mean score of the PET scores for the initial number of participants was 52.95 and the SD was 11.25. Then, from among 171 test takers, those who got scores within the range of 41 to 64 (one SD around the mean score) were selected as the final homogeneous sample and those beyond that range were considered as outliers whose data were excluded from the data analysis. The number of the participants in the sample group was 112 (49 male and 63 female). Before applying parametric inferential statistics to analyze the data obtained from male and female groups, the normality of the distributions was checked by running One Sample KS test as a prerequisite. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** One Sample KS Test Results to Check Normality Assumption

		MaleWTC	MaleIP	FemaleWTC	FemaleIP
N		49.00	49.00	63.00	63.00
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	79.73	127.86	78.95	134.03
	Std. Deviation	7.43	19.04	8.10	21.38
	Absolute	.14	.11	.11	.16
Most Extreme Differences	Positive	.08	.11	.09	.16
	Negative	-.14	-.07	-.11	-.07
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.00	.75	.85	1.25
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.27	.62	.46	.09

The results of the normality check showed that the p-values observed for all four sets of scores obtained from male and female groups' questionnaire responses were above the alpha level of significance (.05) showing that the null hypothesis of no significant differences within groups was not rejected; in other words, the normality assumption could be made and it was legitimate to apply tests of parametric inferential statistics. The WTC and IP questionnaires were given to the participants. The WTC questionnaire had 20 items. The participants would be required to read each item and to write a number between 0 and 100 showing the percentage of their agreement with the situation in the item. The average of percentage scores for the items was calculated as each individual's score in the WTC Scale. Thus, the scores were in interval scale. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for male and female groups' scores in the WTC scale.

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics for Male and Female Groups' WTC Scores

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MFWTC	1	49	79.73	7.430	1.061
	2	63	78.95	8.103	1.021

The number of participants in male group (Group 1) in the female group (Group 2) was 49 and 63, respectively. The WTC mean scores in male and female groups were 79.73 and 78.95 with respective SDs as 7.43 and 8.10. In order to check the statistical significance of the difference between the two

groups' mean scores, and to answer the research question 1, the researcher formulated the null hypothesis stating that there was no statistically significant difference between the two means, and ran Independent Samples t-test with results depicted in Table 4 below.

**Table 4:** Results of Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Male and Female Groups' WTC Mean Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	MFWTC						
Equal variances assumed	1.892	.172	.525	110	.600	.782	1.489
Equal variances not assumed			.531	106.998	.596	.782	1.473

The results showed that the variances in two groups were assumed to be equal since Leven's F-value (.172) was higher than the alpha level of significance ( $p > .05$ ). The p-value observed for Independent Samples t-test (.525) was higher than the alpha level of significance ( $p\text{-value} > .05$ ), thus the null hypothesis of equality between two means was not rejected and the answer to the first research question was negative. There was no significant difference between male and female participants' WTC mean scores.

The second research question was whether there was any statistically significant difference between male and female participants' IP scores. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for male and female participants' scores obtained from the IP questionnaire.

**Table 5:** Descriptive Statistics for Male and Female Groups' IP Scores

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MFIP	1	49	127.86	19.044	2.721
	2	63	134.03	21.380	2.694

As it is illustrated in Table 5, the mean scores for male and female groups were 127.86 and 134.03, respectively. Table 6 shows the results of Independent Samples t-test to test the significance of the difference between two means.

**Table 6:** Results of Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Male and Female Groups' WTC Mean Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	MFIP						
Equal variances assumed	1.585	.211	-1.590	110	.115	-6.175	3.884
Equal variances not assumed			-1.613	107.934	.110	-6.175	3.828

The null hypothesis formulated to investigate the second research question stated that there was no significant difference between male and female participants' IP mean scores. As it is seen in Table 6, Leven's test returned the p-value of .211 higher than the alpha level of significance (.05) showing the equality of variances and the p-value for the t-test was .115 and higher than the alpha level (.05) showed that the null hypothesis of equality of the means was not rejected. Accordingly, the answer to the second research question was also negative and there was not any significant difference between male and female groups' IP scores.

The third research question was whether there was a statistically significant correlation between the participants' WTC and IP in male group. Table 7 shows the results of Pearson Correlation analysis.

**Table 7: Pearson Correlation between WTC and IP in male Group**

	MaleWTC	MaleIP
	1	.798
MaleWTC		.000
	49	49

The number of participants in the male group was 49. The Pearson Correlation coefficient observed was .798 and the p-value observed was below the alpha level of significance selected for the study (.05). The null hypothesis corresponding to the third research question stating that there was no significant correlation between male participants' WTC and IP could be rejected ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, the answer to the third research question was affirmative since there was a high positive correlation between WTC and IP in male group.

The fourth research question was whether there was a statistically significant correlation between the participants' WTC and IP in female group. Table 8 shows the results of Pearson Correlation analysis.

**Table 8: Pearson Correlation between WTC and IP in Female Group**

	FemaleWTC	FemaleIP
	1	.702
FemaleWTC		.000
	63	63

The number of participants in female group was 63. The correlation coefficient observed was as high as .702 and statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). There was a high positive correlation between WTC and IP in the female group. Thus, the answer to the fourth research question was affirmative.

The last research question was whether there was a significant difference between the two coefficients. Fisher r-to-z transformation can calculate a value of z that can be applied to assess the significance of the difference between two correlation coefficients, found in two independent samples ([vassarstats.net/rdiff.html](http://vassarstats.net/rdiff.html)). The comparison between the two coefficients obtained from male and female groups returned the z-value of 1.13 with the p-value of .25 which was higher than the alpha level (.05). Thus, the null hypothesis of equality between the two coefficients was not statistically rejected. In other words, the correlation coefficients between WTC and IP observed in male and female groups were almost equal. Accordingly, the answer to the fifth research question was negative. The statistical analysis of the collected data showed that there was not any statistically significant difference between the amounts of WTC and IP in male and female groups. Both male and female participants showed almost equal amount of both WTC and IP. This finding supported the findings of the study, in Turkish EFL context, by Sinnet and Alishah (2021) who found no significant difference between genders in all subscales of WTC. The findings of the present study also substantiated the findings of the study by Öksüz-Zerey and Cephe (2020) who studied how male and female students differed in terms of their WTC and their perceptions of classroom environments and found no significant difference between genders concerning perceptions of classroom environments and WTC. Other studies also reached similar results where no significant difference in WTC was seen in male and



female groups (Afghari & Sadeghi, 2012; Valadi et al., 2015, Zakian, 2019). However, the findings regarding the gender were in contrary to some previous studies. For example MacIntyre et al. (2002) had found that female students of English in Canada displayed a higher L2 WTC than males. In another divergent investigation, Smith (1997) determined a significant difference of WTC between female and male subjects, citing that girls more frequently engage in conversations than boys. Maftoon and Najafi (2013) also found in their study that Iranian EFL female learners were more willing to communicate compared to their male counterparts. With regard to IP, the present study also found no significant difference between male and female participants and this was contrary to the findings of the previous research (e.g., Akdemir, 2019; Jiang, 2013; Ma, 2014) that showed significant difference between male and female EFL learners' IP with females having more positive IP than males. The fact that the findings of the present study were against those of the previous research can be attributed to the fact that the sample of the present study was selected from university students who were majoring in English language studies and both male and female students had selected their major on the basis of their interest to learn English as an international language. If the study had been done in other contexts and with students from other majors, quite different results might have emerged. The findings of the present study with regard to high correlation between WTC and IP in both male and female groups was supportive of Yashima's (2002) model that identified relations between among IP, L2 learning motivation, L2 proficiency, and L2 communication variables including confidence in L2 communication and WTC. The finding of the present study could also be supported by Macintyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model of WTC in L2 that includes the interrelation between attitude and WTC. Also the present study confirmed Cetin kaya's (2005) conclusion in his research with Turkish college students that WTC was directly associated with the learners' attitudes towards the international community and perceptions of linguistic self-confidence. The finding of the present study also was consistent with that of a qualitative study with Chinese rural secondary school students conducted by Xie (2011) where the international posture was found to be among the factors that contributed to the learners' WTC. Similar finding has been reported in a research conducted by Aliakbari, et al. (2016) with Iranian EFL students in which a structural equation modeling analysis was used to show that the students' WTC was directly related to their attitude toward the international community among other factors. However, the relationship between WTC and IP has not been always substantiated in the previous research. For example, Collins (2013) found non-significant correlations between scores obtained from WTC and IP questionnaires. To explain the unexpected findings, Collins (2013) argued that "one potential reason was in the nature of the university and the type of students it attracts. APU, the venue of the current research, has a highly international student body and operates a dual language curriculum" (p. 74).

### **Conclusion**

The present study attempted to compare the amount of both WTC and IP in male and female Iranian EFL learners. The statistical analysis of the data collected from male and female groups revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female participants' WTC and IP scores. Furthermore, it was found that in both genders there was a significant positive correlation between WTC and IP. The findings of the study were contradictory to those of some previous studies which had seen differences between two genders regarding both WTC and IP as two interrelated variables. The sample of the current study comprised of participants who had selected to study EFL at the university level according to their personal interest, thus, the differences between the findings of the study and the previous research in the field are somewhat predictable. It can be concluded that positive attitudes and high degrees of integrative motivation as compiled in the concept of IP in this study lead to higher participation of the L2 learners, and accordingly, lead to higher WTC. The findings of this research raise pedagogical implications. Teachers should maintain the students' interest in L2 learning through creating enjoyable classroom condition. Material designers should try to include lessons and activities that can encourage students to take communication risks and increase their positive attitudes towards L2 speaking community and culture. In fact, the primary responsibility of teachers should be to decrease the learners' negative feelings and negative attitudes. The present study took a quantitative design in finding correlations between the research variables. For drawing more valid conclusions, further qualitative and mixed method studies should come to complement the findings of such purely quantitative studies. The present study focused on the learners' attitudes to international communication as a predictor of their desires to take the risk of communication in the foreign language. However, there are a great number of other factors that may play a crucial role to break the students' silence and remove their reluctance to participate in communication opportunities.

Future research must be done to explore such factors through open-ended questionnaires, free response interviews and close observations.

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